

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am from Lyme and I am a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence. I am the Open Space Coordinator of the Town of Lyme.

I strongly support the measures proposed in HB-6355 to strengthen The Extreme Risk Protection Order law. Evidence shows that many deaths have been prevented by the ERPO law, but it can be made even more effective with these further measures.

The Extreme Risk Protection Order law, passed in 1999 offers a means of last resort, with due process protections, to temporarily remove firearms from individuals judged to be at risk of imminent harm to themselves or others. It has been shown to prevent firearm suicide and stop mass shootings. Unfortunately, the individual has the gun rights returned to them once the temporary order has expired, with no evaluation of risk.

Because there are often warning signs preceding violent or suicidal behavior this last-resort measure with due process protections is an effective tool for reducing gun violence. Because firearm suicide accounts for up to two-thirds of gun deaths and is the second leading cause of suicide in Connecticut, there is an urgent need to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection Order law to help it save more lives.

It is time to strengthen the current ERPO law and pass the following measures so that it works harder to prevent gun violence.

1. Require a court hearing to demonstrate that the risk of imminent harm no longer exists before firearms are returned.
2. Allow a risk protection order to prohibit an individual from buying a firearm if that individual is at risk of imminent harm to self or others and has shown an interest or intent to acquire a firearm, even if s/he doesn't currently possess one.
3. Allow family, household members and healthcare professionals to directly petition the court for a risk protection order. Currently only law enforcement and states' attorneys can do so. Allowing family members to petition the court directly, as 12 other states do, provides an alternative means of initiating the process for people who are reluctant to involve law enforcement at the outset, because they fear law enforcement or are concerned about stigmatizing the gun owner as a criminal.
4. Require the Court to create and make available on- and off-line educational materials explaining the process, and to make it simple for petitioners to apply for a risk protection order.

Risk protection laws are demonstrated to reduce firearm suicide. A Duke/Yale/UCONN study reported that for every 10-20 risk protection orders issued under Connecticut's ERPO law, one suicide is prevented. Another study reported that Indiana's extreme risk laws reduced firearm suicide rates 7.5%.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law so that it works harder to prevent firearm suicide and homicide. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Wendolyn Hill

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